

Media Relations Policy

Print and broadcast media are critical partners to the Department in our mission to inform the public and disseminate a variety of public health messages. Reporters call the Department daily, looking for data and information about things like health care regulations, pending legislation and budget information, food safety, and disease outbreaks. In addition, the Department releases important public health information to the media, through press releases or media advisories that may generate interest.

The Public Information Officer (PIO) is the main interface with the media and is responsible for approving all information for release to the media. All calls from the media are filtered through the PIO as is all information going out. The PIO helps strategize on best means for distributing messages (e.g. press release vs. press conference) as well as crafting messages and talking points. The PIO may also act as a spokesperson for the Department, and keeps the Director and the Governor's Office informed of what is happening.

Keep the PIO informed:

If you are working on something that is likely to generate media interest, call the PIO to let him/her know about the issue. Even if HEALTH is working in partnership with another agency that is the lead on the issue, it is still important for the PIO to be aware ahead of time of anything that could get media attention. Brief the PIO on the issue and let him/her know who his/her contact at HEALTH should be if media inquiries arise.

If you receive a call or request for information from the media:

- Get the name, number, and media outlet of the reporter, topic and deadline (if possible).
- If the reporter has specific questions, note them.
- Tell the reporter that you will call the Department's Public Information Officer who will call the reporter back.
- Call the PIO at x3998, provide contact information, reporter's questions and additional details as relevant.
- The PIO will then coordinate with the appropriate program staff to provide the requested information. It is important that we respond to media requests in a professional and timely manner, within reasonable limits of staff availability and resources.

Press Releases

HEALTH issues press releases to the media to communicate newsworthy public health information, including advisories on current health issues, health alerts, study findings, program accomplishments, etc. Press releases are messages from the Director of Health, and typically incorporate quotations from the Director. The guiding principle in issuing a press release is that the message is truly newsworthy and it informs the public with a **Single Overriding Health Communication Objective (SOHCO)**, or main message. Often main messages include what's happening (or what happened); what HEALTH is doing; and what the target audience can do.

If you are planning to disseminate public health information through the media:

- Complete a Press Release Checklist and submit it to the PIO with your draft press release. The PIO will ensure that it is in the appropriate format (using the most current press release template).
- The PIO and the Director must approve all information before it is sent to media outlets.
- Press conferences are only initiated if there is a **very** newsworthy issue, such as a serious public health threat or an event, such as the formal release of major study findings. If you are considering a media event, such as a press conference, you must discuss the issue with the PIO or Director before planning begins. If the event is newsworthy enough, the Governor may be asked to participate; however, the Director will decide whether to include the Governor.